Mentoring in the Military: Not Everybody Gets It

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IN *NINETEEN STARS: a Study in Military Character and Leadership,* Edgar F. Puryear, Jr., says that Generals George C. Marshall, Douglas MacArthur, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and George S. Patton, Jr., "spent their entire military careers preparing for high command through study and through working as junior officers for the most outstanding [mentors]—Marshall and Patton [working] for John J. Pershing, Eisenhower under the tutelage of Fox Conner and Douglas MacArthur, and MacArthur through the most unique exposure of them all, his father, Arthur MacArthur.

"Regardless of how able a leader may be, he will not achieve a position of top responsibility unless his ability is recognized by senior officers. [Mentoring] is a part of success, and it should not offend anyone when it is understood that it goes only to those who study, who prepare, and who produce.

"A total of 160 members of the [Fort] Benning faculty and Infantry School students who caught Marshall's eye at the time became general officers in World War II." [1]

Do you have a mentor? If not, why not? This article provides a method for deciding how and when to enter a mentoring relationship. It breaks down each step in seeking a mentor and explains why mentoring is rewarding. Mentoring is far more than just teaching or coaching. Mentoring is about trust, friendship, and in the end, wisdom. There are five steps in the lifelong learning process that officers can follow to increase the benefits mentoring can provide to their personal and professional careers:

1. Become aware of your strengths and weaknesses. A serious self-assessment can maximize the benefits of mentoring.

2. Understand your potential mentor—then seek him or her out. Not everyone has a personality that is suited for a mentoring relationship. Be selective and recognize those who take the time to develop others.

3. Work to maintain the relationship as it progresses. Mentors will distinguish themselves from acquaintances as time passes. It is your responsibility to maintain the relationship.

4. Observe mentoring rules of engagement (ROE) and etiquette. Loyalty is critical for mentoring to occur. To believe that mentors would continuously invest their efforts when their protégés are insincere is naïve.

5. Transition yourself to become a mentor to others. Leader development is a lifelong process. At any point in a career, a person can assume the role of mentor or protégé.

I am not trying to convince you that mentoring should be mandatory. On the contrary, it is a voluntary act that is initiated from a desire to do better. In this article, there are quotes that highlight themes and questions that stimulate self-assessment. The questions should challenge you to discover how this may apply in your career.

History is rich with examples of successful leaders who participated in mentoring relationships. Leaders in the military, in government, and in industry attribute their success to people who were great role models, inspirations, coaches, and guides during various stages of their careers. Secretary of State Colin Powell provides a great example. At various stages in his career, Powell learned from a number of people, both as a mentor and as a protégé.[2]

During exhaustive research while serving in the U.S. Army, Lieutenant General William M. Steele reported to the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, that mentoring and retention are related. The report states that younger officers felt a lack of "a commensurate commitment from the Army to them."[3] When relationships progress from professional to more personal, there is a greater chance that officers will receive the fulfillment or commitment they currently lack.

Be Aware of Your Strengths and Weaknesses

In the *Harvard Business Review* classic, "Managing Your Boss," authors John B. Gabarro and John P. Kotter explain: "Gaining this level of self-awareness and acting on it are difficult but not impossible."[4]

If you cannot admit to deficiencies, it is unlikely that you will enter into a mentoring relationship. Likewise, if you are a poor judge of your leaders, it is equally unlikely that you will enter a quality mentoring relationship. Gabarro and Kotter provide three areas in which to self-assess your needs when considering mentoring: strengths and weaknesses, personal style, and predisposition to depending on authority figures.[5]

Young officers are often overly confident and do not realize their weaknesses. Many do not have the humility to listen to the advice of others. Many people will never enter into a mentoring relationship because they have already limited themselves.[6] A person should be able to match strengths and weaknesses against multiple potential mentors.[7]

Subordinates, then, must become first-class "noticers." They must look around to determine who might fill those needs. One must find a potential mentor to move to the next level in the relationship. A study that Thomas A. Kolditz conducted at the U.S. Military Academy indicates that some people have a certain propensity for seeking out mentoring relationships. Kolditz writes that there is a certain measure of "an individual's liking for, confidence in, seeking of, and perceived utility of feedback."[8] Some people naturally seek out a relationship where there is a greater chance of receiving feedback that is important to their sense of self-awareness.

Initially, it is natural for people to resist the benefits of mentoring. Mentoring is often misunderstood, often being associated with apprenticeship. Some people assume that it is a negative form of favoritism. Brownnosing, playing politics, or schmoozing are familiar phrases that relate to mentoring. Retired U.S. Army General Barry R. McCaffrey counters the critics who say that mentoring is cloning the current leadership. He declares, "We have to fight it [flawed mentoring] and then rediscover it [healthy mentoring]."[9]

Understand Your Potential Mentor

Since people's leadership styles are as different as they are, protégés must quickly gauge what a potential mentor might want. While different mentors may expect different specific items, there are four basic common principles to look for: basic mentoring terms and definitions; functions a potential mentor will perform; mentoring in a military context; and diversity in potential mentors.

Without a basic interest in the stories, anecdotes, or parables a mentor may tell, a protégé is doomed from the start. You cannot fake interest for long. If the mentor perceives that the protégé is not sincerely interested, the relationship will stagnate or dissolve. This type of situation also perpetuates the sometimes-negative reputation of mentoring—brown-nosing just to sit and act the part of a yes-man. Genuine interest is a stepping-stone to mentoring. In some cases, a person will need to actively seek out a mentor. The level or degree of persistence with which this is done depends on the personality of both the mentor and protégé. Protégés should have a good sense of whether their mentors are outgoing or reserved, talkative, or quiet.

Stage of Relationship	Junior Participant	Senior Participant
Initial	Subordinate	Coach
Interim	Protégé	Mentor
Final	Legacy	Sponsor

Figure 1. Consistent Framework for Mentor Terms

People must understand where they fit into the larger picture in any organization. Potential mentors can come from many different sources. In any two-person relationship, a person is often just one part of another person's larger network of associates, friends, and peers. Likewise, protégés can benefit from understanding that they also are the central hub of a larger developmental network.[10] In the case study "Beyond the Myth of the Perfect Mentor," coauthor Linda Hill explains: "The constellation of developmental relationships an individual has can take many forms . . . and include a wide range of people."[11] Instead of learning from just the mentor, a protégé can also learn from various sources all at the same time, whether they are peers, subordinates, or supervisors.

When you begin your search for a mentor, you can use a simple four-point checklist: goals and objectives; pressures; strengths, weaknesses, and blind spots; and preferred work style.[12] This checklist might be unappealing to some people, but as retired General Wesley K. Clark admits, "Personalities are important factors in history and military affairs, even though we don't like to admit it."[13]

Basic mentoring terms and definitions. According to Greek mythology, Mentor was an old friend of Odysseus and tutor to Odysseus' son Telemachus.[14] Far more than being just a coach, Mentor was entrusted with Odysseus' entire household while he was away at the Trojan War. Athena, goddess of war, wisdom, skills, and justice, recognized the trust Mentor commanded and sometimes appeared in his image to pass her wisdom on to others. Mentor's dual qualities—loyalty and wisdom—cannot be stressed enough; they make mentoring unique in education. Mentoring is not simply about gaining wisdom from someone who is wise and learned. Mentoring is engaging first with a person

you know, trust, and feel genuine loyalty toward.

Mentoring, in a military context, is even harder to define. Nowhere in the 614 pages of Joint Publication 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, does the Department of Defense define or even use the word "mentor."[15] Among the services, there is a wide range of interpretations for what mentoring should be. The Air Force mandates mentoring in U.S. Air Force Instruction 36-3401, *Air Force Mentoring*.[16] The Army is looking into it officially.[17] Army Field Manual 22-100, *Army Leadership*, defines mentoring and uses it extensively throughout the manual in a number of different ways.[18] If joint forces are to be staffed with officers from differing backgrounds and services, there must be a common language to avoid confusion, especially on evaluations.

Career Functions	Definition
Coaching	Initial guidance and teaching
Exposure	Opportunity to perform
Protecting	Shelter from harmful situations
Challenging	Given with a purpose
Sponsoring	Outwardly promoting a protégé

Figure 2. The Career Functions of a Coach, Mentor, or Sponsor

Figure 1 shows the specific labels attached to each person in a developmental relationship to distinguish between phases. For this discussion, subordinate and coach are used to represent participants in an early relationship. Most relationships start in a professional hierarchical setting and are characterized as one way. Mentor and protégé will represent only those relationships that move into a phase called the classic mentor relationship. It is the two-way exchange and learning process. Finally, sponsor and legacy will be used when a relationship has moved into the final stage. There may be some controversy with the choice of these words, but there is a specific point to their use. In the third stage, relationships become long term.

The functions of a mentor. The first step in exploring a mentor's role is to examine the functions that a coach, mentor, or sponsor perform. In the past 20 years, there have been extensive academic efforts devoted to determining just what exactly mentors do for protégés. Researchers and scholars agree that Kathy E. Kram perhaps gives the best analysis when she describes the differences in mentoring roles and functions.[19] A mentor performs two functions during a relationship: career functions and psychosocial functions. In broad terms, career functions are "those aspects of the relationship that enhance learning the ropes and preparing for advancement in an organization."[20] Psychosocial functions are those "aspects of a relationship that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in a professional roles."[21]

Career functions. In any work relationship, on initially meeting a subordinate, a certain amount of coaching occurs. To demonstrate proficiency, subordinates require a certain amount of exposure on their own. Once a superior decides that a subordinate shows potential, he might begin to protect the protégé from potentially damaging or harmful positions. This is apparent in the types of missions the protégé is tasked to perform or where he is assigned. The mentor continues assessing the protégé's strengths and weaknesses, thus adding depth to the relationship.

Working in the protégé's best interest, mentors will challenge protégés to gauge their full potential. True talent emerges when a mentor pushes a protégé through a series of tests. Slowly, the protégé earns the mentor's trust and respect. Sponsorship occurs when a sponsor trusts the protégé's competencies and character enough to attach his own reputation to that of the protégé.

Psychosocial functions. Psychosocial functions include role modeling; acceptance and confirmation; counseling; and friendship. Like career functions, psychosocial functions follow a sequence as a relationship develops. Although they appear to be career oriented, psychosocial functions are unique because they tend to "carry over to other spheres of life."[22] Finally, psychosocial functions introduce the concept of the quality of a relationship. While career functions relate more to position and authority between two individuals, psychosocial functions depend on a much more intangible quality between the mentor and protégé. This is the part of mentoring that is impossible to mandate.

Role modeling occurs when a potential protégé recognizes something in a superior that appeals to the protégé's inner values. Common values such as family, work habits, leisure, and hobbies can inspire subordinates. Acceptance and confirmation are the next most likely functions a mentor will perform. These actions foster an even stronger two-way bond between two individuals. Once protégés feel they are in their mentors' good graces, there is much more chance for thoughtful discussion and exchange. Mentors benefit when protégés can express candidly their reactions to their mentors' statements. Both officers will grow. Counseling allows the mentor and the protégé to seriously discuss professional development.

Finally, a genuine friendship is likely to form as the relationship grows. Although this is rare in

a military context, it can occur without either party becoming completely aware of it. The increasing frequency of informal and nonwork-related events signals the relationship's development into this final psychosocial function. The mentor and protégé begin to genuinely enjoy each other's company.

Mentoring in a military context. Army Lieutenant Colonel Gregg Martin breaks mentoring down into distinct categories.[23] Writing from an Army perspective, he points out that doctrine is not specific enough when defining mentor or mentoring. Most doctrine defines mentoring too broadly or too rigidly. Following an observable progression and development in a relationship, Martin uses M1, M2, and M3 to delineate the three stages of a relationship.

Psychosocial Functions	Definition
Role Modeling	Serves as an example to others
Acceptance and Confirmation	Two-way respect emerges
Counseling	Expresses concern
Friendship	Expresses sincere concern for a person's welfare along with trust and respect

The author compiled the table similarly to the work of Kram, *Mentoring at Work*, blended with Hill and Kamprath "Beyond the Perfect Mentor." The author, again, proposes the concept of a natural, chronological flow.

Figure 3. The Psychosocial Functions of a Mentor.*

M1—Teaching, coaching, and leading.[24] The first type of mentoring, M1—professional mentoring—as Martin calls it, is the traditional teaching, coaching, and training that occurs in any organization. Coaching is the most common career function that occurs at this stage. The psychosocial function of role modeling is also present as subordinates search for potential mentors. All coach-subordinate relationships start in the M1 phase.

M2—Long-term personal and professional mentoring.[25] This phase of Martin's model more closely resembles the classic notion of the mentor. Now the two-way exchange moves to the next level. Exposure and protection go hand in hand as the mentor develops the protégé's potential while in the job. As mentors confirm their trust in their protégés, they will challenge the protégés to realize their full potential. Likewise, the psychosocial functions mature as well. Once the subordinate feels a certain level of acceptance and confirmation, the relationship is more likely to achieve its potential. The protégé begins to understand and trust the mentor's advice. A counseling process begins that gradually develops the protégé both professionally and personally.

Together the psychosocial and career functions evolve into the "classic" mentor—a two-way exchange of mutual trust and respect. Then the relationship is at its strongest. Unless a protégé maintains the relationship, the two likely will grow distant such as with former colleagues or an old coach. Through maintenance, the relationship will grow stronger if there are common values, styles, and interests. Otherwise, the relationship might simply fade away.

M3—The strategic mentor.[26] Martin's model contends that M3 occurs as mentors begin to "grow and groom future leaders."[27] Martin rightly contends that this is not classic mentoring. This is networking. Kram discusses the concept of sponsorship as a career function in which sponsors publicly stand behind potential legacies and help improve their careers.

This is the stage where waters become murky; there are increased chances for misusing or abusing the term "mentoring." Networking is not mentoring. An all-too-common trap for young officers is to believe they can network their way to the top. A large Rolodex® does not guarantee a developmental mentor. If that occurs, it is manipulating one's professional network, not a mentoring relationship.

Seeking diversity in a potential mentor is a particularly challenging task for any potential protégé. It is easier to gravitate toward like kinds.[28] People's values will dictate the type of company they choose to associate with as well as the potential protégés they might adopt. Common beliefs in work ethic, political ideology, professional branch, and military service dominate the shared characteristics between the mentor and the protégé. Relationships also tend to resemble each other in areas of race, gender, and sometimes religion.

People criticize mentoring as simply "cloning" ideas and attributes. Research shows that homogeneous relationships tend to form easier because of natural comfort levels.[29] Specifically, race and gender tend to erect barriers that might inhibit a fully developed mentor relationship. However, as in any leader development environment, people should seek diversity and embrace it. There are real factors to consider in a heterogeneous relationship. Specifically, others may view minority subordinates as "token" representatives of an entire minority group.[30] Both parties are responsible for remembering that scrutiny may occur and for overcoming such treatment by addressing issues when they emerge. By crossing traditional lines of branch, gender, race, and regional background, officers can expand the framework for decisionmaking. By understanding

problems from various angles, leaders can make more thoughtful decisions.

To successfully manage a web of developmental relationships, it is critical to understand where each relationship is at any given time. Since protégés must maintain the relationships, they must recognize the unique characteristics of each stage.[31] All career and psychosocial functions overlay a traditional three-phase mentor-protégé relationship. As relationships progress, fewer and fewer relationships advance to the next level.

Observe Mentoring ROE and Etiquette

As retired NATO commander General Wesley K. Clark points out in *Waging Modern War*, there is no "lateral entry" in our leader development process.[32] The quality of those who lead tomorrow reflects the leader development process of today. Fully understanding ROE and etiquette will enhance the benefits of a mentoring relationship.

As in any friendship, only taking from a relationship will cause the relationship to fail. Loyalty maximizes sponsorship and friendship. As time pro-gresses, and if it appears that a protégé is using or exposing information the mentor revealed in confidence, there is little chance the relationship will continue. Applying oneself is another ingredient a mentor looks for in a protégé. There is nothing more frustrating than an unresponsive protégé. Ask these questions: "Am I using my mentor?" "Do I fake sincerity?" "Is this just a charade?" "Am I embarrassed to associate myself with my sponsor?" "Do I ignore the advice I receive?" "Have I grown tired of listening to the same 'war stories'?"

If you answered yes to any of these questions, it is time for serious self-reflection. There is nothing wrong with starting over at step 1 or step 2. Starting over might be a good thing. The worst thing a person can do is to waste either party's time. It is proper mentoring etiquette to end an ineffective relationship. If you want it to survive, work at it. If you do not think it has potential, start over.

Mentoring is a voluntary component of self-development. It promises no reward of riches or guaranteed promotion for those who participate. It lacks common definition among the military and civilian sectors. However, there is little doubt that mentoring can positively affect any professional or personal career. Although some argue that it is nothing more than office politics, there are several distinct functions that mentoring serves in both career and psychosocial arenas.

Whether the goal is individual self-development or overall unit effectiveness, mentoring can provide the glue that holds people together within an organization. Without mentoring, a person can complete a satisfactory career. However, mentoring brings richness that exceeds any attempt to measure it to any person or organization. ***MR***

NOTES

1. Edgar F. Puryear, Jr., *Nineteen Stars: A Study in Military Character and Leadership* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1997), 2.
2. Colin Powell with Joseph Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995); Monster.com discussion with Powell, leader of The Alliance for Youth, America's Promise, 2 February 2000, at <http://jobshadow.monster.com/communicate/genpowell/>.
3. Lieutenant General William M. Steele, Army Training and Leader Development Panel Report (Officers), submitted to the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army (CSA), Washington, DC, May 2001.
4. John B. Gabarro and John P. Kotter, "Managing Your Boss," *Harvard Business Review* (May-June 1993): 154.
5. Ibid., 155.
6. For example, *see* W. Brad Johnson, Jennifer M. Huwe, Anne M. Fallow, and Rakesh Lall, "Does Mentoring Foster Success?" *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (December 1999): 44. Many officers shy away from mentoring relationships because of negative perceptions.
7. Linda Hill and Nancy Kamprath, "Beyond the Myth of the Perfect Mentor: Building a Network of Developmental Relationships," Case 9-941-096 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School, 10 June 1998), 13.
8. Thomas A. Kolditz, Scott A. Peterson, and Heidi H. Graham, "Feedback Seeking Behavior and the Development of Mentor-Protégé Relationships," West Point, 5 (*c.f.* Herold et al., 1996)
9. Personal interview with General Barry R. McCaffrey, U.S. Army, Retired, regarding the merits and role of mentoring, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 27 November 2001.
10. Monica C. Higgins and Kathy E. Kram, "Reconceptualizing Mentoring at Work: A Developmental Network Perspective," *The Academy of Management Review* (April 2001): 12.
11. Hill and Kamprath, 5.
12. Gabarro and Kotter, 155.
13. GEN Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), introduction.
14. Carlos Parada, author of *Genealogical Guide to Greek Mythology*, writes, "To [Mentor] Odysseus entrusted his household when he joined the coalition that sailed against Troy. Athena, assuming several times the shape of Mentor, became the guide of Odysseus' son Telemachus giving him prudent counsel. Since then, we call these people 'mentors.'" Online at <www.hsa. brown.edu/~maicar/Mentor4.html>.
15. Joint Publication 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 12 April 200, as amended through 15 October 2001), at <www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf>.
16. U.S. Air Force Instruction 36-3401, *Air Force Mentoring* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1 June 2000), 1. "Mentor is defined as 'a trusted counselor or guide.' Mentoring, therefore, is a relationship in which a person with greater experience and wisdom guides another person to develop both personally and professionally."
17. GEN Eric K. Shinseki, "The Army Vision: A Status Report," *2001-2002 Green Book* (October 2001). Shinseki lists, as one of his imperatives: "Develop doctrine for mentoring in FM 6-22 (22-100), *Army Leadership*."
18. LTC Gregg Martin, "Mentorship: Meaningful Leadership Concept, Confusing Cliché, or Euphemism for Favoritism?" working paper, 24 June 2001: 7. *See also* U.S. Army FM 22-100, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: GPO, July 1990 and August 1999).
19. Kathy E. Kram, *Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life* (Boston, MA: University Press of America, 1988).
20. Ibid., 23.
21. Ibid., 22.
22. Ibid, 32.
23. Martin, 1.
24. Ibid., 14.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 15.
27. Ibid.
28. Hill, 10.
29. Belle R. Ragins, "Diversified Mentoring Relationships in Organizations: A Power Perspective," *The Academy of Management Review* (April 1997): 13.
30. Hill, 11.
31. Personal interview with Kathy E. Kram, Boston, 5 December 2001. She states that knowing the phases is valuable for individuals to assess where "we are together in a relationship."
32. Clark.

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